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The Journey from Central School for Tibetans to Bodh Gaya

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(An insightful Interview with Mr. Dawa Yakpa Lama)

- **Early Influences: Could you share with us the pivotal experiences during your time at the Central School for Tibetans in Mussoorie that sparked your interest in Buddhism and its teachings? How did your early exposure to Buddhist culture influence your path?**

I came from a Tibetan Buddhist family. My grandfather was Yogi lama in the Mt. Kailash region of Tibet. I still remembered him performing rituals and reading Buddhist texts for villagers.I was admitted to Central School for Tibetans in India**.** The Tibetan Buddhist culture was already there at school, on top of that we study the general concept of Buddhism in the Tibetan language. When I was at school, I had a girlfriend who gave me a gift on Valentine's Day. Her gift truly was a big inspiration for me to dive deep into Tibetan Buddhism during the later part of my life. That gift was the **Tibetan Book of Living and Dying by Sogyal Rinpoche.** Since then, I have been doing research on Buddhist morality, philosophy, and meditation practice to experience nature's reality and its essence and meaning.

- **Journey to Bodh Gaya: We are eager to understand the factors that led you to embark on your journey to Bodh Gaya, the place of Buddha's enlightenment. What motivated you to embrace this spiritual pilgrimage**

As I began to study and practice, think more about **Buddhism**. Slowly the great desire to search for truth and to seek the nature of reality of my inner world of consciousness, primordial wisdom down on me. For any individual who is a serious Buddhist practitioner, **Bodhgaya** is the center of the universe where historical events happened to **Buddha 2500 years**. For a seeker of Truth and inner realization of wisdom and enlightenment, Bodhgaya is the actual location where **Buddha won the victory over Mara within himself via deep samadhi meditation with his mindfulness.** It was the victory of wisdom over ignorance, good over evil, truth over illusion, and delusion within himself with a meditation practice.

He was fighting a great war within himself in meditation and Bodhgaya is the earthly location where he defeated his own demon, ego, and ignorance who were trying to stop him from realizing truth and **ultimate freedom from samsara**. Thus, for me, Bodhgaya is the center of everything and the **great symbol of truth's victory over mara and enlightenment** realized by Buddha. So, Bodhgaya is the pilgrimage site and source of the sacred spiritual energy of truth for Buddhists because of its historical significance.

- **Immersion in Buddhism: How has residing in Bodh Gaya impacted your understanding and practice of Buddhism? Have you found new insights or a deeper connection to the teachings of Gautam Buddha?**

To be honest with you, I feel that if you are a sincere and authentic Buddhist practitioner then **Bodhgaya is the paradise realm of heaven on the Earth** from where hundreds of millions get spiritual inspiration and express their devotion and veneration to Buddha Shakyamuni's enlightenment site. **To be in Bodhgaya is to be close to Buddha and his four noble truth** teaching and to feel his presence via the energy of enlightenment.

It enhances individual Buddhist practitioners to realize ultimate truth, primordial wisdom, love, and compassion and create a peaceful and harmonious atmosphere for themselves and in the world where they live. Thus, I want to live where there is **such kind of positive enlightened energy and love**. In this way, I am more in touch with teaching in connection with its essence concerning Buddha's teaching and spiritual culture and its energy.

- **Significance of Bodh Gaya: Bodh Gaya holds profound importance as a UNESCO World Heritage Site and a revered destination for Buddhists worldwide. From your perspective, how do you perceive the significance of this sacred place in preserving Buddhist heritage and culture?**

Significantly, we preserve Bodhgaya's spiritual heritage by realizing its importance for hundreds of millions of people from different parts of the world. Millions of people come to Bodhgaya by bringing their spiritual essence and the most positive part of themselves to offering to Buddha at Bodhgaya, not to mention financial offerings. Along with them, people bring their **cultural diversity and background to Bodhgaya**. They **build new monasteries, stupas, and statues with a touch of their cultural architecture** by enriching the cultural diversity of Buddhism and beauty at Bodhgaya. Many different Buddhist communities and lays people visit Bodhgaya with the single aim to get blessings from Buddha. By recognizing its significance, **United Nations has declared Bodhgaya a UNESCO world heritage** and cultural treasure. I think the **Indian government should facilitate this site by recognizing**, **its heritage and cultural significance and creating a peaceful atmosphere** with multi-cultural diversity to develop the Bodhgaya area with infrastructure and transport system.

- **Buddhist Heritage Preservation: As a witness to the rich Buddhist heritage in Bodh Gaya, what are your thoughts on the preservation and promotion of these invaluable cultural treasures for future generations?**

To continue with the above answer, Bodhgaya is the most important spiritual heritage site for all Buddhists around the world. Historically speaking Buddha defeated his own demon and mara here and realized the ultimate truth. There is no other place more significant to Buddhists than the Bodhgaya. Therefore, it is the most important Buddhist spiritual and cultural heritage treasure. **By knowing, its significant essence, all Buddhist nations and all Buddhist communities should contribute to the preservation and promotion of Bodhgaya and other Buddhist heritage like Saranath, Kushinagar, and Lumbini, for all Buddhist it is our most valuable spiritual treasure and cultural heritage from where we draw our inspiration and devotion.** Buddhism is considered the most cultured civilization from which we experienced inspirational wisdom, ethnic morality, and compassion for future generations.

- **Impact of Buddhism: How has Buddhism influenced your personal growth and worldview? What lessons have you learned on your journey that has left a lasting impact on your life?**

For me, Buddhism is the source of truth, and natural reality of life, and the meaning of my existence in this world and its purpose. It changed me a lot, in the way, I perceived the natural reality of the world, society, and people. It made me strong in spirit and how to embrace suffering and learned from its experience rather than complaining and blaming others for its cause. **Buddhism made me resilient towards suffering and patient with whatever life offers to you and accept it**. Thus, it developed an understanding of our innate nature which is Buddha nature and its primordial wisdom. This innate nature and wisdom are to be realized through many years of meditation and compassion for all beings to free all from suffering rather than **self-interest and greed**. This primordial wisdom will manifest via your perception and the magical things that happen in reality via your intuition and perception through the realization of truth and compassion.

- **Contributions to the Community: We are keen to know about any initiatives or efforts you have undertaken to promote Buddhism and its teachings among the local community or visitors in Bodh Gaya.**

I have some ideas and thoughts to help the community and visitors via my knowledge but I want to keep myself busy and **focus more on my practice, meditation**, **and research on Buddhist thoughts and philosophy.** I think that there are many Buddhist organizations and nonprofits organization to support the local community and other visitors. Besides, I am not very good at dealing with people who are not sincere and fickle by nature.

- **How do you find Buddhism practiced in Tibet and by the Tibetan community in India different from the Buddhism practiced largely in India?**

Tibetan Buddhism is mostly oriented to **Mahayana and Vajrayana** teachings and its very vast and deep in wisdom, in infinite compassion, in its aspirational prayers, and in its skillful methods and practice of meditation. Many methods of meditation practices, philosophical thoughts like Emptiness, analytical meditation on logic and reasoning and visualization of deity practice, and infinite compassion for all beings to be free from samsara. **On the other hand, Indian and other Southern Buddhism are more oriented towards Buddha's Vinaya teachings with strict rules of celibacy and renunciation of samsaric life and with practice of foundational teaching of Buddha's four Noble Truth,** a realization of no self and finally free from desire and suffering.

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